



# **John Berryman is dead**

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***WSE60***

*John Berryman is dead*

*...because dreams are songs are sound visions are what's left after you've gone*

*Soundtrack: The National*

American Mary

Pay For Me

Bitters & Absolut

Patterns of Fairytales

Looking For Astronauts

All The Wine

Mr. November

Fake Empire

Apartment Story

Guest Room

Blank Slate

Wasp Nest

Terrible Love

Lucky You

I. Tuesday's Child is Full of Grace

*My, oh my Brother John,  
what have we gone and done and  
where have we done and gone*

*two days in the alone and cold*

*...but I was there shortcake  
but I was there...*

Before it became a holy city, New York was hollow  
and money-less. Its pockmarked face didn't do well  
with the pretty women. Now it's the land of aplenty,  
land of the freed. Home of the breathless and the last  
stop before paradise.

*To do list:*

*Later Brother John, later,  
for the moment  
let us chill.*



## *Harlem Renaissance*

The moon is the size of a dime, half the night is gone, the other forgotten;  
she shrugs off a shoulder strap, knows she's a cliché but prefers to believe  
herself ironic. Once upon a childhood, miracles could change the direction  
of the sun. There were chances to run. There were uneven yellow fields,  
a clear river to wade in up to her thighs. Tall summer grass that told her  
stories when the wind picked up from the east. She had secrets, plans.  
Believed the star shaped birthmark on her ankle was a personal message  
from God. Spent days skimming stones, imagined herself in a well lit room:  
white light, white walls and all the time she would ever need to make  
herself over again and again.

## *M o t h e r f u c k e r*

It was a whisper. It was the cock crow. *You're so pretty when you're unfaithful to me.* Get dressed. They'll be home any minute. Who came first: the madness or the booze, booze or madness. *She shaved her pussy, shortcake. It was a special occasion. Just for me baby.* I am used up and useless. Where is the loaded gun when you really need one? The roof top garden offers a view of the downtown skyline. We are bound and determined, left too far apart to ever be right.

*Hey Brother John:  
Jerry Lee is the devil and the devil  
loves fuckin' details.*

*What you see? What you see?*

*She was soft & her breasts  
were round & her lips, her lips  
shortcake. You had to be there.*

*'zactly what I thought baby,  
ain't no thinkin'  
but fuckin'.*

*...and yeah, I was there brother  
that's part of the problem*

*In the morning, when it was raining*

It was this she feared. The end of words. A void so pillow-soft she would sleep forever.  
The woman-girl in a fairy tale. No witch. No prince to wake her. She could see the signs.  
The subtle shift in gravity. The feather lightness of grief. *I see the curve of her hip against the door.* Would you, could you. *Can't.* It was cool for summer. The present a pastel green. The past a rusty oil on an off white canvas. *I love. I love her shortcake. She don't. She no longer believes.* Can see it. Taste it. Smell it. Can't no longer feel it. This moment is used up. *Long gone shortcake.* A brown bird appears on the sill. Flutters its wings. Flies away.

*Blowtorch*

*Pop. 1280.*

*Eleven bars. Six churches.*

*No hope.*

Psalms and antidotes:

lopsided sky

and lollipops

*all that matters is you're okay baby.*

~~Fuck you. Save it for your next lover~~

I love you. For real and  
for ever.

Never mind the mess,  
rough night but mourning  
is Kessler: *smooth as silk baby*.

Load the gun they're on the way  
shake, rattle, rock  
'n roll over.

*... and don't it feel good to be free*  
*Brother John?*

*It's a riot, shortcake; stone cold*  
*motherfucker of a riot.*

## II. Suicide note (Draft #1)

*'Ashes, ashes. All fall down.*

*Magdalena does not believe in ghosts*

that invade a person's dreams. She's a twenty-first century woman, a woman interested in the scent butterflies leave after their wings flutter. She loves edges. Loves anything that will take her down another city block, around corners, up a façade. It's all permanent. Traffic is harsh, air lousy with shouts from irritated cars. It's all breakable. With right timing. With right fist. With beauty. Exhausted tourists walk in circles around Times Square looking for the perfect photo opportunity. Vendors have one eye out for police, one eye on rows of knock off souvenirs. Cold shoulders jostle for taxis. Her never ending stories get written off one by one: she has tea with Don Quixote in the shadow of the Flatiron, a tall stranger she took for granted and then took to bed. Their last fight; outside a trattoria, then the *click, click, click* of six inch heels faded out of sight and sound. Her voice is rough and in the same instant it takes to blow a kiss, loss returns. She's a lapsed Catholic, a sinner with no interest in salvation unless it's a lethal dose. Here comes the A train. There's always a way out. She imagines the look on God's face when He realizes there is nothing left to do but wait.



*A little brown bird told us*

*Tell me a story Brother John  
the one about how you don't want to be  
any part of any body. The one about that woman  
with the, how'd you call it, mouth made for sin.*

Wish my hands were yours. Wish I could feel the blood, feel the rough stone tiles under my feet.  
I am the stigma but you have the stigmata. There are two dozen forms of fill-in-the-blank  
apology. I can't even get your name out. Can't believe I'm not numb yet.

*We are two sheets to the wind shortcake,  
nowhere to go, nowhere to fall;  
pour another and another  
time will lead to another  
short story.*

*Howl*

*That's what is called the domino effect, shortcake:  
One bumps into another and another  
and always one more  
then it's over  
and you're out.*

His friends called him Ginsberg.  
He was a contender.  
He did some heavy damage.  
Ask his wife.  
No gloves, hands taped.  
His girlfriend was  
From the neighborhood.  
Ginsberg said she had him hypnotized.  
Told him stories.  
Easy to swallow versions of the truth.  
Hottest summer on record.  
Told him she was pregnant.  
Wife said: I'll raise your bastard.  
That bitch another story.  
Ginsberg saw the way.  
Tasted the truth.  
Felt the light.

*...ain't nothin' deader than dead, Brother John  
and baby, I've seen dead,*

*Delmore Schwartz died Monday in NYC*

*July 11, 1966.* His body lay in the morgue two days before he was identified. Today is July 11, 20\_\_\_. It is 90 degrees, humidity makes it feel like 103. I wonder what she's doing right now. I imagine the sweat beading off a tall Absolut & bitters. Imagine the catch of her breath as she sees me. Wonder if the ground ever sleeps. Wonder what happens when there is nobody left to forget. Can't remember the day I stopped dreaming, the day I started waking to a blank slate. Would like to think there is somewhere with my name on it. Would like to think there is somewhere. Would like to think she would never know. Right now feels like forever. Right now feels cold.

*Brother John & Mary Magdalena (haiku after Bukowski)*

her ass tits lips long hair  
all left the room and now  
my beer is warm

*You know the truth Brother John,  
gotta let her go baby  
let her rip  
and get your ass outta here.*

*...always easier said than done, shortcake  
and when it's all done there's nothing left  
to do but roll over.*

*Sure enough, sure enough, brother.  
What was it she said?*

*Never leave the house without a (an umbrella) gun*

Doesn't look like rain but the air feels heavy with water. The leaves aren't ready to turn but some of them can't wait to fall. A cab honks at a jaywalker. Stop light flashes yellow. Don't dare walk away again. Two dollar soda from a street vendor, yesterday's newspaper and enough time to kill a good idea. Never wanted to be mistaken for a stranger but here I am. She wasn't the first or last detour. It's not a most serious lie. More like a petty misdemeanor. Goddamn right. If I had a gun I'd shoot the moon.

*Brother John, the Washington Avenue Bridge & the Mississippi*

Imagine a brownstone;  
a dark haired girl skips rope on the sidewalk.  
You sense the *swish swish*, feel  
the rapid rhyme and muffled laughter:

*Down by the river, down by the sea,  
Johnny broke a bottle and blamed it on me.  
I told ma, ma told pa,  
Johnny got a spanking so ha ha ha.*

*Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques,  
What the fuck? What the fuck?*

kaleidoscope

We are all slivers of glass and sand turned to the light, walking body shadows trying to fade into the concrete. Its child's play and when the black turns to grey and grey folds into antique white; it's the only game in town. Set 'em up and watch me knock them fuckers down. She slides her foot up my leg, slow enough that I feel an ache. She tells me she knows me. Slip of a bra strap, a not so shy smile. It's not even close to last call but it's all over. Turn as quiet as you can. Feel the grains slip around the cylinder. Shake it baby, shake it. Don't sweat the small stuff, brother. We can always make time for another round. Watch the greens bleed to red and circles melt into squares.

### III. S u i c i d e

*1. a : the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally, especially by a person of years of discretion and of sound mind.*

*b : ruin of one's own interests.*



*Armed & Ready*

I'm still moving. The city is where my head might be or on the outskirts of town mingling with the unwanted and used up. My breath made it back a minute ago, my thoughts, nowhere to be found. Go back to sleep, baby. I'll be alright after a good night's sleep. Promise to leave the light on. And I'll promise to come home. You know everything vanishes, everything dissolves at the right temperature. Yet, you ask for nothing. Nothing but my hand on your heart and a story, fragile and green.

*We can make that list now Brother John.  
Check it twice. Once you gone baby,  
you gone for good...*

*Lust*

Two bits four bits six bits a dollar  
long hair longer legs last call & gone.

*Gluttony*

2218 First Avenue South: free me up tie me  
down 'til I can't see the Promised Land.

*Greed*

All the Way, Frank Sinatra; Don't Explain,  
Cat Power; Jean Genie, David Bowie.

*Sloth*

whatthehellwashernametheonethatsaid  
you lucky young man damnshe was killer hot

*Wrath*

Just one? What can a man do with just one?  
Isn't even worth crossing the goddamn room.

*Envy*

One.

*Pride*

Anything less than zero.

*...and good and gone shortcake*